

Philosophy of Ministry for the Local Church

The goal of ministry within the body of Christ is stated by the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1:28 *“We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”*

To accomplish this goal, the Head of the Church has provided unified gifts to His church (Eph. 4:11) *“for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”*

With the goal clear and the gifts provided, it is necessary for those who serve the Bride of Christ to pursue a methodology that is consistent with these biblical foundations. This methodology is what will be referred to as the Philosophy of Ministry.

Defined *generally*, a philosophy of ministry is a *set of unalterable principles that determines how you will function in your ministry*. Simply stated, your philosophy of ministry defines *why* you do what you do.

Defined *specifically*, your philosophy of ministry should be drawn from a careful investigation of both the *explicit teaching of Scripture and any implicit methodologies which can be gleaned from seeing how ministry occurred in the early church*. Of course, no discussion of explicit or implicit teachings from Scripture can stand outside of their proper exegetical and hermeneutical control. George Zemek emphasizes this when he writes:

“Although the Bible does not contain a ‘how-to’ book for the carrying on of Christian ministry, all kinds of methodological implications surface from a biblical (i.e. an exegetical) investigation of the doctrines of God’s sovereign grace. The Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, contains mountain ranges of data on this most vital topic. . . .

As a point of caution, we must be patient in our methodological quest. The journey will involve several different, though interrelated, expeditions. All of these theological expeditions will begin quite generally; however, the methodological significance of each one of them should become progressively clearer as that particular ‘leg’ of our journey terminates by merging into the next stage of the overall quest. And, as these stages reach their ultimate destination, the final one will become more transparently methodological” (George J. Zemek’s, Doing God’s Business God’s Way: A Biblical Theology of Ministry, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004, p. xi).

As Zemek implies, and as I believe, when you are able to define your philosophy of ministry in this crucial way, you will not only know *why* you do what you do, by in most cases, *how* to actually do it.¹

The *why's* of ministry in the Church are governed by the primary purposes of the Church provided in the Scripture. What follows is an overview of what the Word of God teaches are the primary purposes for the Church:

- The Church is to glorify and worship God (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 10:31; Rom. 15:5-9; Eph. 1:6; 12; 14; 3:21).
- The Church is to uphold and the Word of God and make it the sole basis for all aspects of life and ministry (1 Tim. 3:15, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, 1 Cor. 2:1-5, 2 Pt. 1:19-21).
- The Church is to equip the saints, through the Word of God, to use their spiritual gifts for the unified work of the ministry (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:1-16).
- The Church is to be a pure and holy people set apart to God in the midst of a corrupt and evil world (Jn. 17:14-21; Titus, 2:11-14; 1 Pt. 1:14-16; Col. 1:28).
- The Church is to be a vibrant community of faith as its members love, edify, and care for one another (Rom. 12; Eph. 3:16-19; 4:12-16).
- The Church is to hold forth the pure light of the gospel to a lost and dying world (Matt. 5:13-16; Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 1 Jn. 1:3-4).

On the human level none of these goals are attainable, particularly when it is recognized that the church itself is simply a gathering of weak and fallen people. However, God has called out the members of His church (Eph. 1:4), He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3), and given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pt. 1:3). He uses the foolish and the weak to shame the wise and the strong (1 Cor. 1:27). It is through divine enablement, based on the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the power of God's Word, that the Church can and will accomplish its purposes. On the basis of this reality Christ proclaimed with confidence "I will build my Church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18).

I believe the methodological *how's* of ministry within the church must begin with five core commitments derived from scripture that must infiltrate and govern all aspects of the ministry of the local church. These must truly become the building blocks of any local body of believers.

Core Commitment #1: A High View of God

- God in His position is exalted on high (Is. 6:1-3; Ez. 1:26-28; Php. 2:9-11) as the creator (Gen. 1-2; John 1:1-3) and sustainer (Col. 1:16-17) of his creation. Thus making Him the Sovereign Lord (1 Tim. 6:15-16; Rev. 19:16) and Righteous Judge (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 19:11; Rev. 20:11-12; Rom. 2:16) of all that He has created.

¹ See Philosophy of Ministry Handbook, Professor Lance Quinn, *The Master's Seminary* Spring 2014 p. 3

- God in His person exists triunally in the persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; Matt. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 13:14). He is the eternal One (Rev. 1:8; Ex. 3:14; 1 Tim. 1:17), the all-powerful / omnipotent One (Job. 38-42; Is. 40-48; Jer. 32:17), the all knowing / omniscient One (Ps. 33:13-14; Prov. 5:21; Lk. 8:17; Ps. 44:21), the ever present / omnipresent One (Ps. 139), the needless / aseitous One (Ps. 50:7-15).
- God in His character is holy / set apart from everything He created (Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8; 1 Pt. 1:16), blazingly righteous with no blemish or shadow (1 Jn. 1:5-7; Ps. 11:7), and completely just in His judgments (Ex. 34:7; Dt. 32:4). However, as is summed up by Moses in Ex. 34:6-7, God's character is also *"Compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness and truth; who keeps loving-kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgressions and sin."*
- A high view of God based on His position, person and character has some heavy ramifications on the body of Christ, the full scope which can not be elaborated on here. However, there are a few important implications arising from this first core commitment.
 - First of all, it necessitates that we heartily bring God worship and praise for the following reasons: He is worthy of it (Rev. 4:11; Rev. 5:12-14; Rom. 11:33-36; 1 Cor. 10:31; Heb. 13:15), we are commanded to do it (Dt. 6:13; Matt. 4:10), it is His purpose in saving us (Eph. 1:6; 12; 14; Rom. 15:8-9; Is. 66:23), and it is the consummation or end-goal of all things (Ps. 22:22-27; Is. 66:23; Rev. 11:15-17; 14:6-7; Php. 2:9-11).
 - Furthermore, a high view of God puts the utmost priority on holiness and sanctification in the life of each believer for the following reasons: because God is Holy (1 Pt. 1:14-16), it is pleasing to Him (Rom. 12:1-2), it is His will (1 Thess. 4:3), it is His purpose in saving us (Eph. 2:10).
 - Also a high view of God will prevent a Church from becoming man-centered, which is a ministry philosophy that cannot be blessed by God (Is. 48:11; 2 Cor. 4:5; Ps. 50:21-22).
 - Finally, a high view of God promotes a healthy fear of Him (Prov. 1:7; Ex. 20:20; Php. 2:12) and a deep love and appreciation for who He is.

A commitment to a high view of god, leads us to view His Word as the perfect guide for our lives.

Core Commitment #2: A High View of Scripture

- The Church must believe in the nature of the Bible. It is the inspired (2 Tim. 3:16-17), inerrant (Jn. 17:17), infallible (Ps. 19:7-9), and self-authenticating (Heb. 4:12) Word of God.
- The Church must submit to the absolute authority of Scripture (Ps. 119:89; Is. 40:8; Matt. 5:18-19; Matt. 24:35; Jn. 10:35; Jn. 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Pt. 1:20-21).
- The Church must recognize the complete sufficiency of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pt. 1:3; Ps. 19:7-9).
- The Church must fully rely on the surpassing power of Scripture (Matt. 4:4; Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:15; Jn. 17:17).

- A high view of Scripture demands that:
 - The Church gives the Word of God the supreme priority in its ministry (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Tim. 4:13).
 - The Church handles the Word of God with extreme care to ensure an accurate interpretation and exegetically derived doctrinal positions (Ez. 7:10; Is. 66:2; 1 Tim. 4:6; 1 Tim. 4:15-16; 2 Tim. 2:15; Titus 2:1).
 - A bold proclamation of Scripture (Ez. 7:10; Ps. 119:172; Acts. 6:4; Rom. 1:16; 1 Thess. 2:9-13; 2 Tim. 4:1-4).
- Due to these demands based on the nature of the Word of God and the nature of how God revealed His Word, it is my conviction that biblical exposition is the biblically prescribed means by which God's word is to be proclaimed. My basic definition of it is as follows: *Expository preaching is clearly communicating from a passage of scripture the original authors intended meaning so as to draw out the timeless implications for a modern day audience.* Preaching which does not diligently study and preach God's Word in the way God inspired it is in danger of missing its true or full meaning and therefore the church will be hindered in its ability to submit to the authority of the Word, recognize the sufficiency of the Word, and see the power of the Word.

A commitment to the sufficiency of the Word is the basis of a biblical view of mankind.

Core Commitment #3: An Accurate View of Man

- Man from birth is depraved (Eph. 2:3; Ps. 51:5) to the core of his being (Jer. 19:7-9; Matt. 7:21-23). We are all incapable of doing good (Rom. 3:10-18), incapable of accepting truth (1 Cor. 2:14), continually pursuing wickedness (Gen. 6:5), enslaved to our sin (Jn. 8:34; Rom. 6:16-17) and only getting worse in our sinfulness (Rom. 1:18-32; 2 Tim. 3:13). It is on the basis of these realities that we are truly dead in our sins (Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 3:23) and without hope for eternity.
- A sinner who is alienated from God has a natural bent is to seek fulfillment from the world's evil system (1 John 2:15-17). This mindset produces the following frightening implications:
 - Christ is not seen as the only solution to man's needs
 - Men will try to provide substitutes that promise fulfillment
 - Men will tend to only address "felt" needs rather than real needs
- An accurate view of man produces within the heart of a church:
 - A necessary humility before God as we recognize our sinfulness (Jas. 4:6)
 - A necessary dependence upon God as we recognize our own inability (Jn. 15:4-5)
 - A necessary commitment to the gospel as we recognize it as being the only source capable of raising the spiritually dead to life (Eph. 2:4-10; 1 Cor. 1:17-18; Rom. 1:16)

An accurate view of man helps us to understand the design of God in the building of His Church.

Core Commitment #4 - A Biblical View of the Work of Service in the Church

The Work of Service in the Church to Fellow Believers - Edification

- The body of Christ is by very nature a relational entity as it is ultimately a gathering of people. However, it is far more than just a social club, it is a community of faith made up of the children of God. Therefore it is to be a living and vibrant spiritual family. The bible speaks in very specific ways as to how members of the body of Christ / family of God are to relate to one another. The following is a sample list of some of these major categories:
 - Love (1 Jn. 3:16; 4:7; Gal. 5:13-15; 2 Thess. 1:3)
 - Discipleship (1 Thess. 5:14; Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:2; Titus 2:3-5)
 - Use of Gifts (Eph. 4:16; Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pt. 4:10)
 - Fellowship (Acts 2:42; Phil. 2:1-2; 1 Jn. 1:3; 7)
 - Unity (Eph. 4:13; Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:10)
 - Submission (Rom. 12:10; Heb. 13:17; Eph. 5:21; 22)
 - Edification (Eph. 4:15; 29; 1 Cor. 14:12; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 10:24)
 - Forgiveness (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13; Matt. 18:21-35; Mk. 11:25-26; Lk. 7:47)
 - Prayer (1 Tim. 2:1; Jas. 5:16)
 - Bearing each others burdens (Gal. 6:2)
 - Confrontation (Gal. 6:1; Matt. 18:15-18; Rom. 15:14; 1 Cor. 5:1-2)
 - Service (Jn. 13:12-17; Gal. 5:13; Phil. 2:3; 1 Pt. 4:10)
 - Giving (2 Cor. 9:7; 1 Jn. 3:17)
- This type of vibrant body life will only be accomplished based on a rich and deep understanding of and submission to the Word of God. None of the above list will come naturally to us in our sinful selfishness. However, as the people of God hear and submit to His Word our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ will grow and mature.

The Work of the Service outside the Church to Unbelievers - Evangelism

- The Word of God is clear that the mission of the Church to the world is one of evangelism. We are to be salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16) to a dark and tasteless world. In His final commands to his disciples Jesus Christ told them to "Go... and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19). And certainly the book of Acts bears that out as the primary activity of the apostles was preaching the gospel, establishing churches, and discipling new believers. The balance of the New Testament repeats these truths (Rom. 10:13-15; Eph. 6:19-20; Phil. 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:2-4; 2 Tim. 4:5; 1 Jn. 1:3:3; etc).
- However, the primary purpose of the church is not one of evangelism, but rather of equipping it's members for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12). Certainly this includes equipping them for evangelism, which is primarily to take place at the personal level, not the corporate (church) level. This brings us to an important distinction that will determine the trajectory of a local church... Evangelism is not

the responsibility of the church per se, it is the responsibility of *each member* of the church. As members of his body we are all called by Christ Himself to faithfully take the gospel into our unique spheres of influence throughout the week. However, our primary commitment and responsibility at our corporate gatherings is toward believers, not unbelievers. This responsibility is even resident with the great commission itself in Matt. 28:19-20. In verse 20 it says that we are to teach them to obey all that Christ has commanded them. That is certainly a lot more than just the truths of the gospel, though those truths are included. Obeying verse 20 will mean the integration of new disciples into a thriving body of Christ where they can hear the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27) and be made complete in Christ (Col. 1:28). We can see this focus also resident within the ministry of the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 2. In verse 1-5 he focuses on his gospel proclamation in the city of Corinth. But then in verses 6-7 he makes it clear that those who have been genuinely converted ("mature") need the full wisdom of God's Word.

- In the Church's mission to the world God not only ordains the ends (evangelism), but he also ordains the means through which the gospel comes (holiness in the life of a believer). We must be a holy and separate people who faithfully share the gospel with those in the world, yet do not partake in their worldliness (Jn. 17:14-21; 1 Pt. 2:9-12).

A correct perception of the purpose of the church (see pg. 2) and the work of the church helps us to correctly understand biblical leadership.

Core Commitment #5 - A Biblical View of Spiritual Leadership

- A biblical spiritual leader must be qualified in his character (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). It's instructive that all the qualifications of an Elder / Overseer are based on the man's character with the exception of his ability to teach. In direct opposition to the modern view of spiritual leadership that places the highest value on gifting and effectiveness, the Word of God places the highest value on character, and so must we.
- A biblical spiritual leader must be a model of godliness for the flock (1 Cor. 4:16; 1 Cor. 11:1; 2 Thess. 3:7-9; 1 Tim. 3:12; Heb. 6:12; Heb. 13:7; 3 Jn. 1:11). This is a heavy responsibility that a shepherd should not take lightly. All leaders within the church should recognize the weight of responsibility that comes with their privileged position. As leaders, we have no right to be culturally edgy, careless, or reckless with regards to the example we set for the flock.
- A biblical spiritual leader must shepherd the flock with patience, care, and love (1 Pt. 5:1-4; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; Acts 20:28; Jn. 10:11-13). The biblical model for leadership is that of a shepherd. He is not a cattle driver who herds the sheep along from behind, nor a visionary who boldly blazes a new and innovative trail. Instead he is a shepherd who lovingly cares for all the needs of the sheep. He takes time to get to know his sheep and lets them get to know him. He earns their trust by demonstrating his trustworthiness over time. He protects them at all costs even if it means laying down his own life. It would appear that much of the strife

and confusion in the church today would be corrected if the leaders of the church understood themselves to be simple shepherds.

- A biblical spiritual leader must equip the people in the Word of God for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-12; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Titus 2:1; 15). This will take place through faithful preaching, teaching, counseling, and discipleship in the Word of God. A preacher of God's Word must recognize the supreme importance and high stakes of shepherding the people in the Word faithfully (Jas. 3:1; Heb. 13:17). The health of the ministry and spiritual growth of the sheep depend upon a consistent diet of faithful preaching, teaching and discipleship in the Word (1 Tim. 4:16).
- A biblical spiritual leader must train up shepherds and leaders within the flock (2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Cor. 4:17). It is my firm conviction that the strength of the church is the men of the church being trained in the Word of God to be strong shepherd-leaders both in their homes and in their ministries.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the faithful efforts of Brian Arnold (Grace Immanuel Bible Church, Jupiter Fl.), Lance Quinn (Thousand Oaks Bible Church, Thousand Oaks, CA) and Jerry Wragg (Grace Immanuel Bible Church, Jupiter Fl.) for the comprehensive information provided in this Philosophy of Ministry. What is found in this document is but a modification of their prior efforts (particularly Brian's) to fashion a philosophy of ministry grounded upon the Word of God. May our Lord continue to bless their 2 Tim. 2:2 efforts!